

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 140 436

EA 009 597

AUTHOR Deal, Terrence E.; Celotti, Lynn D.
 TITLE "Loose Coupling" and the School Administrator; Some Recent Research Findings.
 INSTITUTION Stanford Univ., Calif. School of Education.
 PUB DATE 77
 NOTE 29p.

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$2.06 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Administrative Organization; *Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; *Instructional Programs; *Organizational Theories; Staff Utilization; *Teacher Administrator Relationship; Team Teaching

ABSTRACT

Using information gathered in 1973 and again in 1975, this study examined the relationship between instructional configurations, on the one hand, and organizational factors at three levels (district, school, and classroom), on the other hand. Data for the study were gathered from questionnaires and interviews with superintendents in 34 San Francisco Bay Area school districts, as well as principals and teachers in 103 elementary schools within those districts. The study yielded three general conclusions about the nature of relationships between organizational and instructional patterns and between levels within districts. First, methods of instruction seem to be virtually unaffected by organizational or administrative factors at the school district level. Second, the way teachers work together, as reflected by the presence or absence of teaching teams, is similarly unaffected by higher echelons. Third, the three levels of educational organization (district, school, and classroom), as well as the individuals at each level, operate rather autonomously, yielding an image of vertical and lateral segments that are only loosely coupled to one another. (Author/JG)

 * Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
 * materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
 * to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
 * reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
 * of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
 * via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
 * responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
 * supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *



Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, STANFORD UNIVERSITY STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

ED140436

"Loose Coupling" and the School Administrator: Some
Recent Research Findings

Terrence E. Deal

Lynn D. Gelotti

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION OR THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE.

Stanford University
School of Education
Stanford, California
1977

EA 009 597

"Loose Coupling" and the School Administrator: Some
Recent Research Findings

Terrence E. Deal and Lynn D. Celotti

The main concern of schools is instruction. Though that may appear obvious, it has implications for school administrators. It implies that instructional activities will be coordinated, supervised, and evaluated at the school and district levels. It implies that administrators will implement work patterns that support the instructional program. It implies that administrators will have numerous formal and informal channels for influencing classroom activities. Or does it?

For the past five years the Environment for Teaching Program of Stanford's Center for Research and Development in Teaching has conducted a program of studies that look carefully at the relationship between instruction, on the one hand, and organizational structure and process, on the other. Superintendents in 34 Bay Area school districts, as well as principals and teachers of 103 schools within those districts, provided information in 1973--and again in 1975--describing their districts, schools, and classrooms, their perceptions of organizational patterns, and their perceptions of ongoing instructional processes.

The studies now completed have yielded three general conclusions about the nature of relationships between organizational and instructional patterns and between levels within districts. First, methods of instruction seem to be virtually unaffected by organizational or administrative factors at the school or district level. Second, the way teachers work together, as reflected by the presence or absence of teaching teams, is similarly unaffected by higher echelons. Third, the three levels of educational organization--

district, school, and classroom--as well as the individuals at each level, operate rather autonomously, yielding an image of vertical and lateral segments that are only loosely related to one another.

For some administrators, these findings will not come as much of a surprise. For others, the findings will be an unacceptable statement of their ability--or of anyone else's ability--to influence or control what happens behind the classroom door. For our part, we would hope that this view of school organization might stimulate some new administrative approaches, approaches perhaps more compatible with the unique character of the individual school or district than previous approaches have been. Perhaps the findings will open some new vistas for administrators who want to make a difference.

In this paper, we report some of our research findings and discuss their implications for the organization and administration of public schools. The paper is organized into five main sections: The first describes the research setting--the participating districts, the focus of the study, and our initial assumptions. The second discusses the methods of analysis. The third identifies the influences on classroom instruction and organization. The fourth examines the phenomenon of "loose coupling." Finally, we discuss the implications for school administrators, developing some useful guidelines--and options--for those who administer organizations that do not fit the standard bureaucratic model.

The Research Setting

Participating Districts and Schools

The research study was conducted in 34 Bay Area school districts ranging in size from one to over one hundred elementary schools. The

districts were located in urban, suburban, and rural settings and included various economic levels--from very wealthy to very poor districts.

The superintendent of each district provided information (by both interview and questionnaire) about the district's economic level, its organizational patterns, the relationship between the central office and the schools, the community environment, and school-community relationships.

Information from the vantage point of the school site was provided by principals in 103 randomly selected elementary schools within the 34 districts. The schools varied in size from those with teaching staffs of 4 to those with staffs of 30. The principal provided information (by interview and questionnaire) about the school's physical plant, schoolwide organization, instructional approaches and practices, the community environment, and school-community relationships. Teachers in 18 of these schools completed questionnaires wherein they described their classroom organization and instructional approaches or techniques.

Organization and Instruction: The Areas of Focus

Since the primary purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between organization and instruction, most of the information gathered from administrators and teachers fell into these two areas.

Specifically, superintendents provided information relevant to such characteristics of the district as size, wealth, instructional expenditures, the proportion of the district staff serving as "special" administrators (staff, as opposed to line personnel), the explicitness of district policies, the locus of decision-making, the evaluation practices employed, and the superintendents' own leadership orientation. Information was also collected on certain community characteristics, including the ratio of white

to non-white students in the district, the socioeconomic status of families in the district, the teachers' organizations and their degree of influence, and the nature and amount of special outside sources of funds.

Principals provided information about such school characteristics as architectural design, including size and open space; organizational structure, including staff differentiation, numbers of instructional specialists, other specialized or administrative roles such as aides, volunteers, or administrative assistants; and collaborative relationships among various roles, particularly the existence and nature of teaching teams. They also described efforts to integrate leadership roles with individual efforts, and to link policies with practice, types of standing and ad hoc committees with ongoing decision-making, evaluation processes with teaching effectiveness, and so forth. Principals also provided information regarding other aspects of instruction that could vary from school to school, such as instructional materials, student grouping patterns, and the individualized pacing of learning. Finally, principals characterized the community environment in terms of ethnic and socioeconomic composition, diversity of educational expectations, and the perceived level of support from community groups.

Teachers provided more detailed information about organization at the classroom level, including their interaction with other teachers and/or ancillary personnel and the presence of aides, specialists, and volunteers. Teachers also described in considerable detail their use of instructional materials and grouping patterns, the pacing of instruction, instructional decision-making, and evaluation.

Initial Assumptions

Using the information gathered in 1973 and again in 1975, the study examined the relationship between instructional configurations, on the one hand, and organizational factors at the three levels--district, school, and classroom--on the other. We tried to determine which influenced the others. The underlying theories or ideas brought to the study were these:

1. That classroom organization and instruction are interrelated: It was assumed that more individualized patterns of instruction (a variety of materials, diverse student groupings, and various levels of pacing) would produce a more complex organization of personnel--more aides, volunteers, and specialists, as well as a higher degree of collaboration among teachers. In turn, more complex classroom organization would presumably encourage more individualized instruction.

2. That classroom organization and instruction are affected by characteristics of the school or district: Size and finances, open-space architecture, and specialists would be expected to be associated with individualized instruction and new forms of classroom organization, i.e. teaching teams. We assumed also that both individualized instruction and teacher collaboration, or teaming, may come about or be affected by district or school policies, by the superintendent's or principal's leadership style and evaluation processes, or by other administrative or organizational factors.

3. That classroom organization and instruction are affected by environmental characteristics: We assumed that the ethnic and socioeconomic status of the clientele, the diversity of educational values in the community, and the presence or absence of special funding would have direct influence upon modes of instruction and the work arrangements of classroom teachers.

All of these assumptions are supported by modern organizational theory and previous educational research, not to mention the common sense of many teachers and administrators. The study was designed to put the assumptions a more rigorous test.

Methods of Analysis

One of the strengths of the study was its longitudinal design. Often, a research study will gather information and investigate the relationships between the variables of interest in one time-bound body of information. This strategy is limited, since it is impossible to determine what causes what, or to determine the effects that an unaccounted factor may have had on the observed relationships. Correlational research sometimes reveals interesting relationships; but from the standpoint of the practicing educator, knowing only that two things are related is not enough. For example, the data may associate the frequency of teacher evaluation with extent of individualized instruction, but their causal relationship, one to the other, remains unknown. Yet which one caused the other is of vital interest to a policy maker--a principal, say--whose task is to promote individualized instruction in a school.

Because this study is longitudinal--including, as it does, information from both 1973 and 1975 concerning school organization and methods of instruction--it is possible to look more carefully at what appears to cause what. The main strategy used to test the three main ideas about the relationship between organization and instruction is shown in Figure 1. In the diagram, A represents measures of teacher collaboration or instruction as described in 1973; B represents the same features as described in 1975.

The block labeled C represents the various organizational features of districts, schools, or classrooms--or characteristics of the larger environment--as described in 1973 that might affect instruction or teacher collaboration over a two-year period. The arrow from C to B indicates causal relationships, the effects of one factor upon another, taking into account the initial (1973) level of teacher collaboration or instruction.

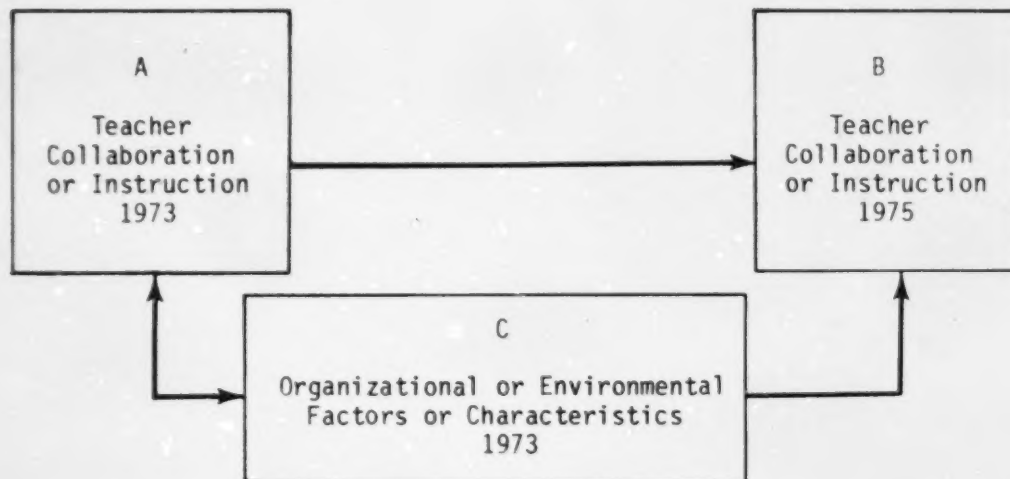


Figure 1

To an administrator the diagram might point up several matters of interest: (1) How stable is teacher collaboration or instruction over time? Do the levels increase or decrease? These questions are answered by looking at the relationship between A and B. (2) What organizational patterns were related to teacher collaboration or instruction in 1973? This is answered by looking at the relationship between A and C. (3) From an administrator's standpoint, however, the most important relationship is that between B and C: What factors cause an increase or decrease in individualized instruction or

teacher teaming over time? What aspects of organization or administration can be altered or reinforced to stimulate desired patterns of classroom organization and instruction? Are there environmental forces that can be captured to produce desired changes in the classroom?

These questions can be asked of data collected in a longitudinal study, since past as well as present procedures are assessed. In this case, the nature of instruction or teaming in 1975 may be simply an extension of patterns existing in 1973, or these practices may reflect other organizational factors inherent in the schools. Knowledge of such causes and effects would provide useful insights for the practicing administrator.

The results of the analysis directly address the two administrative issues posed initially: (1) How do communities and administrators affect what goes on in the classroom? (2) What aspects of the organization--or the community environment--can be used to influence present (and future) operations within the classroom?

The Findings of the Study: Influences on Classroom Instruction and Organization

The results of the analysis are reported for two major concerns. (For a full presentation, see Cohen, Deal, Meyer, and Scott, 1976.) Shown first are those factors that influence individualized instruction. The index of individualization used in the analysis included measures of the variety of materials used, the diversity of student groupings, and the extent to which instruction is "paced" to fit the learning rates of individual students. The instructional index characterizes schoolwide instructional patterns (for reading), not the patterns of individual classrooms.

The second analysis reports those factors that produce teacher collaboration, or teaming. The index of collaboration reflects both the number of teams existing within a particular school and the closeness or intensity of the working relationships among teachers who are team members. The indices of both instructional individualization and teacher collaboration are based on the reports of the school principal. However, similar analyses using teachers' reports revealed similar patterns.

Factors Influencing Instruction

Figure 2 summarizes the longitudinal analysis of various influences on classroom instruction. Two relationships are illustrated: (1) the continuity of instructional practices between 1973 and 1975 and (2) organizational or administrative effects on 1975 instructional patterns. (Not shown are the relationships between organizational factors and instruction in 1973.)

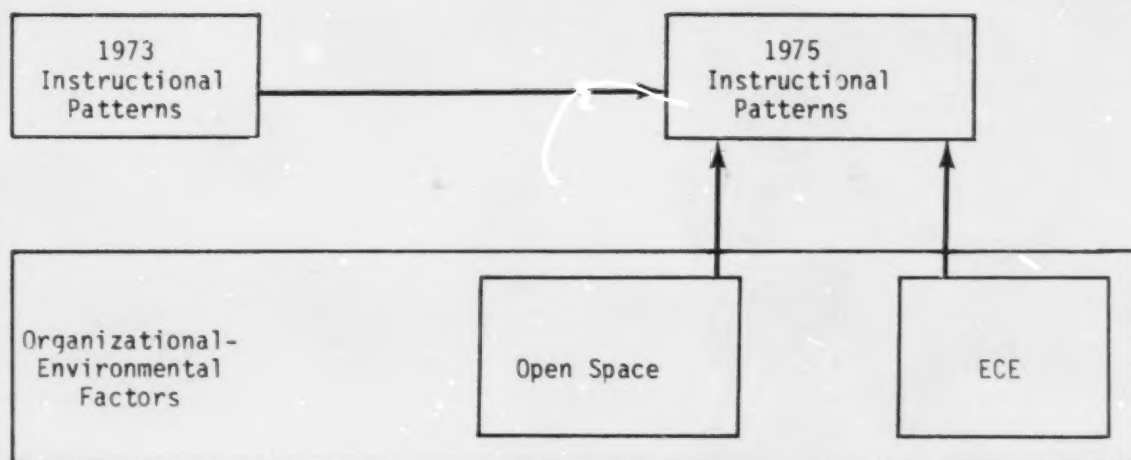


Figure 2

We found, first, that instructional patterns appeared to remain fairly stable over the two-year period.

Second, only two factors were found to have affected individualized instruction: open space, a feature of a school's physical design; and ECE, (Early Childhood Education Program), a specially funded state program and, therefore, an environmental influence. Both factors produced higher levels of instructional individualization over time. But most striking is the finding that individualization of instruction was not affected by the organizational features of the classroom: number of aides or volunteers, use of teaching teams, and so on. Neither was it affected by the organizational or administrative features of the school: school size, availability of specialists, evaluation processes, administrative styles, or schoolwide policies. Instructional modes were also unaffected by organizational factors at the district level: district size and wealth, per-student expenditures, special administrators, district policies, evaluation, or the superintendents' leadership styles. With the exception of ECE, instructional individualization is independent of environmental pressures, such as Title I funding, ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics, and the influence of teachers' organizations.

In summary, many of those factors anticipated as having significant effects on instructional processes actually appeared to be ineffectual. Neither administrators nor the traditional organizational channels through which administrators or members of the community might exert influence appear to affect the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. What, then, about teaming?

Factors Influencing Teacher Collaboration, or Teaming

The results concerning teacher collaboration, or teaming, shown in Figure 3, are similar to those for instruction, with some important differences.

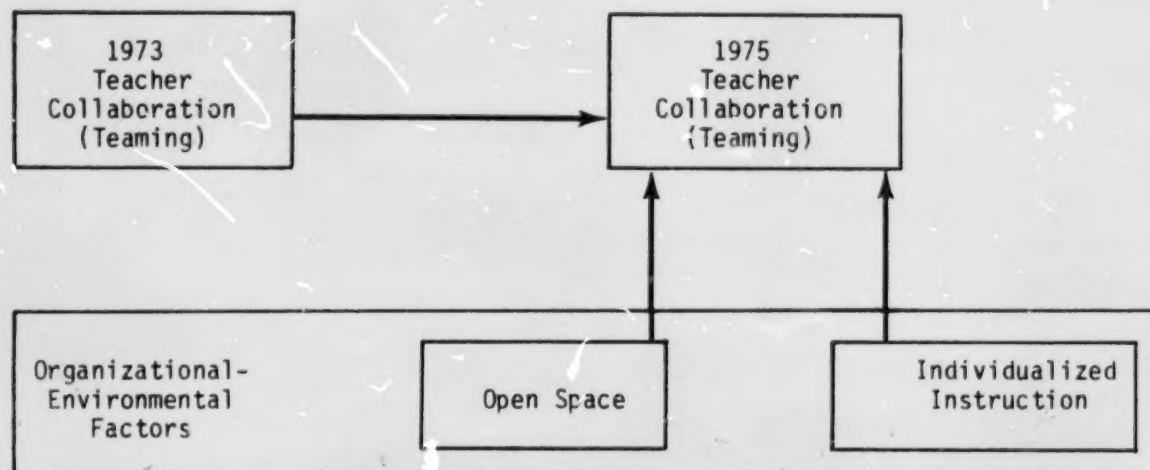


Figure 3

First, unlike individualized instruction, teacher collaboration is highly unstable over time. Teams form, dissolve, and reform with variations in membership over even a two-year period. Additional analyses confirm that teacher teaming constitutes a very fragile set of relationships, particularly where teams are large, or where team members are highly interdependent in the sense that they engage in the joint teaching of classes or assume collective responsibility for students. Over time the number of teaming relationships in a school did not change dramatically, but the intensity was reduced. Moreover, the membership of teams in 1975 was often entirely different from that of 1973. (See Cohen's Problems and Prospects of Teaming, 1976, for further details.)

Second, although teaming does not appear to affect instruction, individualized and small-group instruction did lead to teacher teaming. Teachers seem to form small work groups in response to the demands of more complex instructional approaches. But these arrangements do not endure for long.

Third (but not shown in the diagram), the teachers' organization, an external influence, has a negative effect upon the intensity of teaming arrangements. In districts where teacher organizations are reported to be highly influential, the intensity or closeness of relationships among team members actually declined between 1973 and 1975.

Fourth, a school's participation in the ECE program does not affect teacher collaboration.

With the above exceptions, the factors influencing classroom organization are similar to those for instruction. Open space, again, is important. But other features of the classroom, school, district, or community do not affect teacher collaboration, the aspect of classroom organization in which we were most interested. Teacher collaboration or teaming is similarly unaffected even by schoolwide policies encouraging it. Neither is teaming affected by district policies or by community factors supportive of teacher collaboration. Thus, teaming is not affected by any of the organizational, administrative, or environmental characteristics that one might assume would bear some impact.

Summary of Findings: A Lack of Effects

Contrary to the initial theories or assumptions about the factors expected to affect classroom organization and instruction, we found mainly a pattern of non-effects. Open space, largely an accident of history (provoked

by the need for cheaper construction), is the most powerful predictor of instructional mode. The California State Department's Early Childhood Education Program increases instructional individualization, but does not seem to affect the closeness with which teachers work. (Deal, Intili, Rosaler, and Stackhouse, 1977, discuss other ways in which ECE does affect classroom organization.) Individualized instruction does tend to produce teacher teams. But, perhaps because of the lack of ongoing organizational reinforcement or support, these groups appear to dissolve nearly as quickly as they develop.

The organizational pattern emerging from these results is one in which district officials, school administrators, and community characteristics have little impact on what happens in the classroom. Rather, the classroom is portrayed as a relatively autonomous unit, shielded from formal influences from the school, district, or community, or even from the teacher next door (as the following section will support). Far from finding the administrators influencing instruction through established channels, we uncovered patterns that may all but eliminate administrative influence on instructional activities in the classroom--except to the extent that personal charisma or more subtle means have any effect. The image of school organization emerging from this study is one of discrete organizational levels: the activities of one unit tend to be decoupled from the others.

An Interpretation: Loose Coupling

The term "loose coupling," when applied to districts or schools, describes two different organizational characteristics. The first is the absence of tightly regulated linkages within or between organizational

levels. The second is the lack of agreement within or between levels: members of various units have differing, even contrary, perceptions of the school setting and its functioning.

The previous section highlighted the lack of well-established formal linkages between the levels of school organizations. Do participants within these levels see things the same way? In tightly knit, well-coordinated organizations the participants share a high level of agreement on organizational rules and practices. Thus, one would assume that within schools or districts, on the one hand, or between superintendents, principals, and teachers, on the other, there would be consensus on such matters as the existence of policies, the frequency of evaluation, approaches to decision-making, instructional modes, and so forth.

In our analysis, we found little agreement when superintendents, principals, and teachers were asked the same questions. About most issues, superintendents did not agree with principals, nor did principals agree with teachers (see Table 1). Within districts, there was little consensus among principals; and within schools, there was little consensus among teachers. In many cases, schools in different districts and teachers in different schools had more perceptions in common than those in the same setting. Agreement, once again, was particularly low around areas of instruction. In some areas--such as student characteristics, or architectural configuration--agreement was high, leading us to believe that the general lack of agreement was more than just measurement error. (See Meyer, Scott, Cole, and Intili, 1977.)

What accounts for these results? The research study did not set out initially to investigate structural looseness in schools or to assess its

benefits or costs. Rather, the image of the school organization as a loose collective of various levels performing functions independently, as segmented units, grew out of our findings--out of our not finding the expected relationships among different components of school organizations. The loose-coupling construct has received further support from our inability to find formal school or classroom linkages or general consensus among superintendents, principals, and teachers in areas where higher agreement might be anticipated.

TABLE 1

Agreement Between Principals and Teachers and Between
Principals and Superintendents Regarding Educational
or Organizational Issues

Principal and Teacher Agreement

High

- . Percent of teachers in open space
- . Socioeconomic level of students
- . Number of minutes per day spent in reading and math

Low

- . School policies on instruction
- . Time teachers spend in preparation
- . Level of teacher teaming

Principal and Superintendent Agreement

High

- . Emphasis community places on student autonomy
- . Socioeconomic level of students
- . Frequency with which school is evaluated by the district

Low

- . District's policies on instruction and curriculum
- . How decisions are made about instructional materials and methods

Attempts to explain the pattern of structural looseness in schools have yielded a theory of institutional control (Meyer, 1975; Meyer and Rowan, 1976). Seen from this viewpoint, loose coupling is a rational attempt by educational organizations to survive in a complex, turbulent environment. The educational enterprise is one where goals are diffuse, the linkage between instructional activities and learning outcomes is problematic, and conceptions of the learning process are contradictory. Consequently, tight control of activities is impossible, even wise, since there is no basis for assessing the virtues of activities, and coordination or inspection might very well encourage conflict and undermine support. What is controlled in educational organizations is categories: place, subject, and role. There must be a place called school with certain characteristics, a curriculum including topics meeting certain specifications, and the roles of teacher, administrator, and student. Place, subject, and role are tightly regulated organizationally and institutionally. What goes on once these categories are established, however, is taken as a matter of confidence or faith. To attempt to coordinate roles, to link activities with outcomes, to inspect activities, or to subject the place called school to a "rational" microscope will lead to conflict and the lessening of social support.

Loose coupling is thus a means of organizational adaptation. But administrators are given the primary responsibility for coordination and control. What is to be their stance in a loosely coupled organization? What are the advantages and disadvantages of loose coupling?

Implications for Administrators

The foregoing findings--evidence of structural looseness in schools, the absence of school and district effects on instruction and other features of

the classroom--have several implications for administrators. But the implications need not be negative for the aware administrator. Knowledge of the existing patterns provides advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and constraints. Perhaps the strongest implication is the importance of recognizing not only the existing patterns, but also the opportunities and pitfalls such patterns produce. It is a naive administrator who approaches subordinates or superiors assuming that schools behave exactly like organizations in business and industry. What guidelines can be developed from these findings to increase the administrator's effectiveness?

Guideline Number One: School Organizations Do Not Fit the Bureaucratic Model

The organizational structure of schools is segmented. At the district, school, or classroom level important activities are carried out. But these activities are not "coupled" or coordinated formally. Instruction, the main activity of schools, is not formally controlled or inspected by higher levels. Rather, educational categories--topic, place, and role--are regulated by institutional beliefs. With these categories intact, instructional activities are regulated by faith, confidence, and a belief that "proper" instruction is occurring. Attempts to evaluate instructional activities or outcomes, to alter the basic categories, or to more tightly coordinate levels or activities run counter to the basic organizational character of schools.

Guideline Number Two: Structural Looseness Has Some Advantages

We can point, perhaps to five advantages of structural looseness.

First, in loosely coordinated organizations, adaptation to changing conditions is simpler. Teachers in their individual classrooms are free to institute, unilaterally, their own changes in methods or program as students

change or as new approaches become available. Administrators, whose roles are separate and distinct from those of their colleagues, are unencumbered by demands to collaborate when formulating policy and developing an administrative style appropriate to the community or the immediate circumstances. Tightly coordinated organizations, by contrast, are often unable to adapt easily to shifting circumstances. Loosely structured organizations can change without bureaucratic "hassle" and red tape.

A second advantage is that structural looseness in schools is accompanied by "the logic of confidence," the assumption that proper instruction is taking place without direct administrative supervision. This faith in the expertise and dedication of the staff frees the administrator from the duties of the overseer. The economies of time and energy are obvious. In schools particularly, goals are notoriously vague, and appropriate classroom procedures are hard to specify. It is therefore easier to substitute faith and trust for inspection, supervision, and evaluation. If schools become more tightly linked through evaluation, administrators, parents, and the community will eventually see some things they don't want to see. The belief system that holds the organization together will then break down.

Third, the incidence of conflict may be lessened when organizational units are allowed to function independently. When planning proceeds without collaboration, the strain of negotiation and compromise is minimized, if not eliminated. Autonomy among personnel, therefore, saves planning time, eases interpersonal strain, and allows individuals to adapt readily to perceived changes in role requirements. Moreover, the notion that loose coupling is inherent in the nature of schools is widely accepted. Communities are interested in controlling subjects, roles, and the place called

"school." But there seems to be little if any societal pressure for a loosely coupled school to be anything else. In fact, there is some evidence that higher levels of teacher collaboration and more frequent interaction between teachers and specialists are associated with conflicts within the school as well as between school and community.

Fourth, loose coupling reduces coordination costs. Meetings, coordination, policy development, evaluation activities, and planning take time, cost money, and require skills that administrators and teachers have not fully developed. Trying to produce a "tighter ship" may impose considerable distractions on the instructional program and other important activities.

Finally, at least on a personal level, the advantages of loose coupling are quite naturally appealing. Most of us cherish the latitude to go our own way. Few people express a willingness to be coordinated or controlled--particularly if they view themselves as self-reliant professionals.

Guideline Number Three: Loose Coupling May Reduce Individual and Organizational Effectiveness

In any organization it is virtually impossible for all to go their own way. Though teachers may prefer to operate independently, complete isolation is impossible. The instructional staff members share a common schedule and the same student body, facilities, community environment, and administrative team. At some point, interaction--even interdependence--is inevitable. Teachers do work side by side, sharing experiences, techniques, frustrations, joys. Occasionally, teachers complain about the loneliness and isolation of their roles. It is quite natural for teachers to share experiences or for administrators to respond with suggestions. More formalized coordination may be just a step away; to resist that step may seriously

limit effectiveness. There is some evidence that formal coordination is associated positively with teacher morale--particularly in large schools or in those schools with ECE funding.

A second disadvantage of loose coupling is that administrative control is less easily maintained than in tightly coupled organizations. In schools, the channels of authority are less clear, and somewhat confused. In traditional organizations, loyalty extends upward, the chain of command downward. In schools, both loyalty and authority appear to flow downward. For example, a teacher is probably most concerned with the instruction of individual students and cultivates two-way relationships, based on loyalty, to facilitate learning. The principal plays at best a supportive role, the teacher seeing the principal as only indirectly related to success with a student. A teacher is more responsive to those demands that emanate from "below" than to those imposed from "above." In loosely coupled organizations, clients exert more control than does the community or the formal organizational hierarchy.

A third disadvantage of loose coupling is its potential contribution to the frequent turnover of educational innovations. New techniques, materials, textbooks, subjects, kits, aids, panaceas, come and go rapidly in schools. Without an ongoing supportive structure, teachers are free to experiment according to personal commitment--or whim--and then to let the initial momentum dwindle, soon to be replaced by another inspiration. Innovation and change always create an abundance of problems. Without broad-based organizational support, these problems often undercut desired programs.

Fourth, at odds with its conflict-lessening potential, structural "looseness" may contribute to conflict. In work settings, it is often important to have some consensus on roles, responsibilities, decision-making

processes, evaluation procedures, and other organizational operations. In schools, as the research shows, there is often little agreement between superintendents and principals, between principals and teachers, or among the teachers themselves about important aspects of everyday organizational life. These different images can (and do) often breed distrust and rumor, and cause people dedicated to the same course to step unknowingly on each other's toes. As an illustration, in a small alternative high school with a staff of seven, every staff member had a different image of his own part in decision-making. Thus, each action or event was perceived in seven ways; each attempt to reach decision produced conflict; meetings became confusing and distressful; and other individuals' motives, intentions, and behaviors were misconstrued (Huguenin and Deal, 1977).

Fifth, and perhaps most important, the current pattern of school organization raises some questions about the local control of schools. In theory, a community, through an elected board of trustees, determines what kinds of learning are in the best interests of children and the community-at-large. Via a "chain of command"--superintendent, principal, and teacher--these wishes and expectations are transmitted through an instructional program to students. Our research results suggest, however, that local control is exerted mainly around the basic categories of education--having a place called school, having a curriculum, and having the roles of principal, teacher, and student. The community can determine what programs are added or deleted, but what goes on within classrooms is controlled neither by the community nor by the "chain of command," and each teacher can go his or her own way. Where, for example, a school has three third grade classes, the three may have radically different instructional approaches. These differences

are not decided systematically, but are, rather, determined at the discretion of the individual teacher. In sum, neither the community nor the administrators currently have much influence over the classroom activities and procedures.

*

What does all of this mean for the administrator heading an organization of the loosely coupled variety? Which type of administrative style is most suitable? Four options seem obvious.

Option Number One: The Administrator as Myth-Maker or Myth-User

Administrators who accept loose coupling can influence instruction through the subtle exercise of personal influence. Since this option is highly individual and situational, it does not easily lend itself to precise description. Generally, what seems to take place is this: The administrator, consciously or subconsciously, employs handy community- or school-related myths in achieving desired ends; while generating an image of conforming to myths cherished by members of the staff or community, the administrator influences the course of events.

For example, the principal of an alternative school could direct an excellent instructional program tailored to the needs of the student body and producing optimum learning outcomes. But whether the school-related myths are conspicuously preserved or violated can be the keystone upon which rests the program's ultimate success or failure. Were the school setting an annex atop a sidestreet bakery, the community would be likely to question the existence of worthwhile learning. If, on the other hand, the program were housed in a traditional school setting, its activities--whether traditional or not--would probably go unquestioned, perhaps even be

supported wholeheartedly. The myth of student appearance, of course, is a potentially volatile issue. If this alternative school principal could inspire student commitment to tokens of good grooming, such as short hair and tidy clothing, the rest of the program could deviate markedly from the norm, with the community presuming just the opposite.

It is the loosely coupled relationship between schools and their environmental elements that allows the pursuit of these departures from the norm to succeed. By judiciously cultivating a few time-honored myths, the administrator might make a difference.

Option Number Two: The Administrator as Structure-Builder

Another approach administrators can take combines insights gained from "loose coupling" with more "legitimate" or formal sources of power. Influence and authority available to administrators by virtue of their title and position can be potent levers in school or district management. Loose coupling can be somewhat reversed by utilizing the more well-established channels of authority to delegate responsibility. An administrative team amidst an aggregate of teachers does not necessarily offer the chief administrator a great deal of control. But by defining goals and objectives, and then policies and roles to achieve those goals and objectives, he can begin to "tighten" the coupling. Designating a lower-level administrator to spearhead, effect, and coordinate the efforts of others, for example, is one method of moving toward specified objectives. By carefully delegating responsibility, adroit administrators can actually increase their control over outcomes.

Option Number Three: The Administrator as Symbolic and Formal Leader

A combination utilizing personal elements (Option 1) and structural

elements (Option 2) is clearly a possible, if not a desirable, course of action. A haphazard administrative style may inadvertently incorporate varying degrees of the two modes; but it is a deft administrator who consciously recognizes and taps innate sources of personal influence in concert with the sources of energy inherent in the school organization. A case study comparing reading achievement in two New York elementary schools exemplifies this administrative style.

Briefly, two inner-city schools, similar in student, school, and community characteristics, had remarkably divergent degrees of success in their teaching of reading. The schools were almost perfectly matched in racial composition of both students and faculty, and in their array of available facilities and instructional materials. The significant gap in reading achievement prompted the New York State Office of Education to investigate the discrepancy and to isolate the factors contributing to the successful school's record. The findings revealed the differing modes of administration to be the critical variable. In the high-achieving school, the principal had delegated the responsibility of designing and coordinating a viable reading program to one of his vice-principals. He maintained his ultimate authority while increasing the scope of his effectiveness through a subordinate placed in charge of achieving a specified objective. The vice-principal answered to the principal if successful--or not--and awaited final evaluative feedback from the principal.

The program flourished, and the principal reinforced his rational use of the organizational perspective with personal touches. Although he embodied none of the traditional charismatic nuances, he demonstrated a sense of empathy toward colleagues and community in several ways--too many to mention

in this cursory account. (See New York State Office of Education, Performance Review, 1974, for further detail.) He delivered the teachers' monthly salaries personally; designated an empty classroom as a parent lounge, open to them for meetings, study sessions, and informal gatherings; promoted cultural celebrations at school honoring the diverse ethnic components of the community; maintained colorful displays of student artwork in the corridors; and in many other ways heightened a dedication to all aspects of the school and its programs.

Option Number Four: The Administrator as Powerless Reactor

The case study recounted above serves to illustrate this last option as well. The principal of the less successful school contrasts sharply with his counterpart. As principal, he filled the title and position--but not its potential for constructive leadership. His administrative style vacillated between hand-wringing and fist-clenching. He and his vice-principals performed administrative tasks but offered no instructional guidance. Their comments regarding the below-average reading levels were expressions of hopelessness. They and the rest of the staff attributed the test scores to poorly designed tests and, more vociferously, to environmental factors in the community. The entire staff, administration as well as teachers, were thoroughly disillusioned with teaching and convinced that any attempts to reverse the trends would be utterly futile. Negativism prevailed, since the only expressed goal--to restore order--remained vague and elusive. The deterioration of the physical plant was a visual manifestation of the deterioration in community support, teacher commitment, student effort, and reading scores.

Conclusion

It seems obvious that instruction will remain the main activity of schools. Less obvious, perhaps, is how instruction will be influenced and controlled. Today, the individual classroom seems to operate independently of influences from other teachers, the principal, the district office, or the community working through prescribed channels. Though this organizational pattern has advantages, it also has limitations.

Administrators can draw several lessons from this research. Those who wish to have an impact on instruction have two main options: they can find new strategies for working within a loosely coupled system or they can create formal linkages through which administrative influence can be exercised. The most important lesson, however, is to recognize that school organizations--for good reasons--may be quite different. Administrators (and researchers) must recognize, but not necessarily accept, a new image of schools. To do so will contribute to survival and success. Not to do so will provoke--quite needlessly--turmoil, pain, and stress.

References

- Cohen, Elizabeth G. Problems and Prospects of Teaming (Research and Development Memorandum No. 143). Stanford, Ca.: Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching, June 1976.
- Cohen, Elizabeth G., Deal, Terrence E., Meyer, John W., and Scott, W. Richard. Organization and Instruction in Elementary Schools: First Results, 1973 (Technical Report No. 50). Stanford, Ca.: Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching, 1976.
- Cohen, Elizabeth G., Deal, Terrence, E., Meyer, John W., and Scott, W. Richard. "Technology and Structure in the Classroom: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Relation Between Instructional Methods and Teacher Collaboration." Unpublished paper, Environment for Teaching Program, Stanford University, 1976.
- Deal, Terrence E., Intili, Jo-Ann K., Rosaler, Jean A., and Stackhouse, Anne. "The Early Childhood Education Program: An Assessment of Its Impact and Implementation." Final Report for the State of California. Stanford University, 1977.
- Huguenin, Kathleen, and Deal, Terrence E. "The Anatomy of an OD Intervention." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, April 1977.
- Meyer, John W. "Notes on the Structure of Educational Organizations" (Occasional Paper No. 3). Stanford, Ca.: Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching, 1975.
- Meyer, John W., and Rowan, Brian. "Notes on the Structure of Educational Organizations." Revised version. Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, 1975.
- Meyer, John W., Scott, W. Richard, Cole, Sally, and Intili, Jo-Ann K. "Schools as Organizations: Instructional Dissensus and Institutional Consensus". In M. Meyer et al., Studies on Environment and Organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977.
- New York State Office of Education. Performance Review. New York: New York State Office of Education, 1974.